

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for generating animated images, the system comprising
 - a data encoder for compressing data relating to the animated image to be generated using a predetermined compression format;
 - a transparency information component embodied in the data, the transparency information component providing information relating to a degree of transparency of a part of the image; and
 - an identification component contained in the data that identifies to a data decoder the compression format that has been used to compress the data.
2. The system of claim 1 in which the compression format used by the data encoder and the data decoder is a FLIC file format.
3. The system of claim 2 in which the transparency information component embodies ALPHA information incorporated in the FLIC file format so that, together with color information in the FLIC file format, a data word specifying color and transparency of each pixel of the image is created.
4. The system of claim 2 in which the identification component is an information chunk incorporated in a first chunk of a first frame of the FLIC file format to enable the decoder to determine that a different FLIC file format is being used.
5. The system of claim 4 in which the information chunk contains information as to whether or not the FLIC file format being used does contain any ALPHA information.
6. The system of claim 4 in which the information chunk contains information relating to a color palette used in the FLIC file format.
7. The system of claim 6 in which, where more than one color palette is available for use, a palette change chunk is included in the data following the information chunk to enable a palette change to be effected.

8. A method of generating animated images which includes the steps of compressing data relating to the animated image to be generated using a predetermined compression format; including a transparency information component in the data for enabling a determination to be made as to a degree of transparency of a part of the image; and incorporating an identification component in the data that identifies to a data decoder the compression format that has been used to compress the data.
9. The method of claim 8 which includes using a FLIC file format as the compression format.
10. The method of claim 9 which includes embodying the transparency information component as ALPHA information incorporated in the FLIC file format so that, together with color information in the FLIC file format, a data word specifying color and transparency of each pixel of the image is created.
11. The method of claim 9 which includes implementing the identification component as an information chunk incorporated in a first chunk of a first frame of the FLIC file format to enable the decoder to determine that a different FLIC file format is being used.
12. The method of claim 11 which includes inserting in the information chunk information as to whether or not the FLIC file format being used does contain any ALPHA information.
13. The method of claim 11 which includes inserting in the information chunk information relating to a color palette used in the FLIC file format.
14. The method of claim 13 which includes, where more than one color palette is available for use, including a palette change chunk in the data following the information chunk to enable a palette change to be effected.

15. A method of modifying software used in the generation of animated images, the method including inserting a transparency information component and an identification component into a part of a data file, the identification component identifying to a data decoder the compression format that has been used to compress the data.

16. The method of claim 15 in which the data file is a FLIC format file and the method includes inserting the transparency information component into at least one chunk of the FLIC file.

17. The method of claim 15 which includes implementing the transparency information component by way of an ALPHA technique by incorporating an ALPHA component in the data file to be compressed and decompressed in generating a sequence of images.

18. The method of claim 17 which includes modifying a data file of the FLIC file format to incorporate the ALPHA component by including a second byte of data relating to the ALPHA component.

19. The method of claim 18 which includes modifying a run chunk of the FLIC file format so that data following a chunk header is a full image that is compressed with one of word oriented run length encoding (RLE) and Huffman encoding.

20. The method of claim 19 in which, where RLE is used, each packet of RLE data consists of a count byte and at least one data word.

21. The method of claim 20 which includes expanding the data word to BGRA.

22. The method of claim 21 which includes expanding the data word by using the least significant byte to get BGR information from a BGR color palette with the ALPHA component being taken from the most significant byte of the data word.

23. The method of claim 16 which includes inserting the identification component as an information chunk into a first chunk of a first frame of the FLIC file format.

24. The method of claim 16 which includes inserting a palette change chunk into the data file where more than one palette is contained in the information chunk.

25. A data carrying signal which includes compressed data relating to an animated image to be displayed, the data incorporating color related information, transparency related information and an identification component embodied in chunk components of the data, the identification component identifying to a data decoder the compression format that has been used to compress the data.

26. A gaming apparatus which includes a game controller and a display, the game controller controlling the display of images related to a game played on the gaming machine on the display, the game controller including a system as claimed in claim 1 for generating animated images to be displayed on the display.